

CAP Leaders Die in Plane Crash

Written by CAP Public Relations

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Civil Air Patrol leaders die in plane crash

Pacific Region director of operations, Nevada Wing commander en route to Rosamond, Calif.

Nov. 9, 2007

MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, Ala. — Two nationally recognized and highly regarded members of the Civil Air Patrol — Col. Edwin W. Lewis Jr., director of operations for CAP's Pacific Region, and Col. Dion E. DeCamp, commander of CAP's Nevada Wing — died Thursday evening when their CAP plane crashed south of Las Vegas.

Lewis had traveled to Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas to drop off a CAP airplane to be used as an airshow display. He and DeCamp were apparently en route to Rosamond, Calif.,

Lewis' hometown, when the crash occurred.

Lewis and DeCamp had enjoyed long and distinguished careers, both in the U.S. Air Force and the Civil Air Patrol, the official auxiliary of the Air Force. Most recently, both men were actively involved in the search for legendary American aviator Steve Fossett.

Lewis, 71, had served in the Civil Air Patrol for more than 50 years. He was a former national vice commander, elected in August 1993. He served in that capacity for one year. Before that, he served as Pacific Region commander for four years. He also was California Wing commander from 1978 to 1982.

Lewis was both a CAP and USAF command pilot with more than 28,000 flight hours.

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He retired from Pan Am as a commercial airline pilot in 1989 to become a research pilot with NASA. Since 1997, he worked at Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., where he instructed in four aircraft – C-12, C-20A, DC-8 and T-34C – supporting NASA-Dryden flight test programs. He also was the center's aviation safety officer.

Lewis's military awards include the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, Air Medals, Meritorious Service Medal and others. His CAP awards include Distinguished Service Medals, Exceptional and Meritorious Service Awards, Gill Robb Wilson Award, the Search and Rescue ribbon, and others.

He is married to the former Midge Chrestenson. They have two adult sons, Eric and Steven.

Lewis was a region advisor for the Fossett search.

DeCamp, 73, of Reno, Nev., has been commander of the Nevada Wing since 2003. Most recently, he led the wing's initial search efforts for Fossett, who disappeared on Labor Day during a solo flight in Nevada. The search for Fossett, who has yet to be found, was the largest in the Civil Air Patrol's modern-day history.

DeCamp is married to CAP Lt. Col. E.J. Smith, who also served as search Incident Commander during the Fossett mission. He is survived by adult son, Michael and two daughters, Kristin and Gayle.

Col DeCamp joined CAP in 1994 having served as Nevada Wing director of operations, vice commander, representative to the Nevada state SAR Board and Pacific Region director of operations training before becoming Nevada Wing commander.

DeCamp was a CAP and USAF command pilot with more than 27,000 flight hours, and was

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retired from the California Air National Guard, served in Vietnam and flew C-130 missions worldwide. He retired, as Captain, from American Airlines in 1994.

The cause of the Thursday evening's crash is unknown at this time. A full investigation of the crash by the National Transportation Safety Board is scheduled to begin this morning.

"The CAP family is deeply saddened by this tremendous loss," said Brig. Gen. Amy S. Courter, CAP interim national commander. "There were no finer members than Col. DeCamp and Col. Lewis. Their illustrious volunteer service, which collective spanned more than seven decades,

touched innumerable lives and now, in sorrow, consoles those left behind as a testament to their dedication and commitment to the citizens of their respective communities."

The Civil Air Patrol was founded on Dec. 1, 1941, less than a week before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor brought the United States into World War II. Today, CAP performs 90 percent of continental U.S. inland search and rescue missions as tasked by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center and was credited by the AFRCC with saving 105 lives in fiscal year 2007.

In addition to their search and rescue duties, CAP volunteers perform homeland security, disaster relief and counterdrug missions at the request of federal, state and local agencies. Members also play a leading role in aerospace education and serve as mentors to the more than 22,000 young people currently participating in the CAP cadet program.

Media Contacts:

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